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ABSTRACT

The paper examines how teachers of women's studies can challenge college students' attitudes about women's nature, roles, and futures. It focuses also on how teachers can set consciousness raising as a major course objective. To better understand a consciousness change experience, teachers should examine the nature of consciousness, the possible results of consciousness changing in the classroom, and responsibilities of a teacher who sets consciousness changing as a classroom goal. Information on these subjects can be found in numerous psychological studies, including "The Principles of Psychology," by William James, "The Doors of Perception," by Aldous Huxley," and "The Origins of Modern Science," by Herbert Butterfield. From these studies, teachers can gain information about limitations of awareness, custom and habit, expectations, role perceptions, socialization, behavior patterns, preconscious attitudes, and stream of consciousness. Teachers must then select or develop a teaching method to encourage consciousness raising among students. A method particularly suited to this purpose is the classical critical method (inquiry approach). Advantages of this method are that it helps students discover the nature of women's studies, analyze the constituent parts of the discipline, and synthesize personal awareness of the subject with other people's perceptions of it. The conclusion is that this classical critical method is the best way to allow students to systematically examine a topic and come to a new understanding of it. (DB)

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Consciousness Changing in the Women's Studies Classroom

Susan S. Arpad and Joseph J. Arpad

The first Women's Studies courses taught at American universities were initiated by students involved in the radical campus politics of the 1960s. The courses often appeared in the curricula of the "alternate universities" or "free universities" of that decade, and many were little more than consciousness raising groups with reading lists. Although Women's Studies courses became more disciplined and academic as they became a regular part of university offerings, most of them have maintained consciousness raising as a course objective.

Because Women's Studies challenges the traditional paradigms about women's nature, women's roles, and the possibilities for women's futures, students must undergo genuine change in the way they see the real world. This change frequently is a single flash of insight which embodies a new perception of a familiar situation. A series of such minor experiences can culminate in a more profound experience, one in which the student's consciousness, perhaps even personality, is radically and permanently altered. The person who undergoes such an experience is thoroughly shaken. Like a person who experiences a religious experience and who feels "born again," she needs to reintegrate and reforge her consciousness.

Most teachers of Women's Studies courses have either experienced this radical change of consciousness themselves or have seen students

undergo the process. Most teachers of Women's Studies courses, in fact, manipulate the classroom structure to increase the likelihood that consciousness changes will take place in their students. Recognizing this, we think that it is incumbent upon Women's Studies teachers to examine the nature of consciousness, the possible results of consciousness changing in the classroom, and the responsibilities of the teacher who sets consciousness changing as a classroom goal.

I.

When one speaks of consciousness changing, one often treats the process casually, implying that it is simply a matter of increasing one's awareness, of expanding one's consciousness. Granted, for many students this is all that happens in the classroom--the "doors of perception" are momentarily opened to admit new information. Something more profound, however, is implied by the idea of consciousness changing. First, we must recognize, as William James did, that consciousness is not a fixed entity, but that it is constantly changing, a "stream of consciousness."[1] Then we can see, as James did, too, that while our consciousness is changing from moment to moment as it flows, the process by which we form our stream of consciousness is a process which we build up over a lifetime and which remains relatively constant or unchanging. When we speak of changing consciousness, therefore, we are talking about changing the way in which our consciousness is founded--how it is stabilized, fixed.

The person who undergoes this change of consciousness thus often experiences it as a change from order to chaos. It is a radical change.[2]

Because her process of consciousness formation has changed, her personality changes, and this change leaves her feeling disturbed and unbalanced. Although she has a new personality, she still retains her old habits, customs, and behavior patterns. Her life still revolves around old social and cultural relationships. Consequently, she often feels almost schizophrenic--split between her old self and the new, between the old familiar world and the world as she now sees it. Consciousness changing leads, therefore, at least temporarily, to instability. At its worst, it can lead to psychological breakdown. At its best, it necessitates a period of adjustment, wherein the individual experiences an acute self-consciousness, while strained social and cultural relationships are realigned.

Given this situation, the question must be asked: what is the responsibility of the Women's Studies teacher? We could answer, as many in the academy do, "I am an objective and disinterested scholar. I am a teacher, not a psychologist or social worker."[3] This answer might prove satisfactory in normal, traditional teaching situations. However, as long as Women's Studies courses aim to change a student's consciousness, we would assume that the teacher bears some responsibility for the effects of this goal. The problem we would address here, then, is: how can a Women's Studies teacher respond to this situation? To answer this question fully, we must further probe the nature of "consciousness."

II.

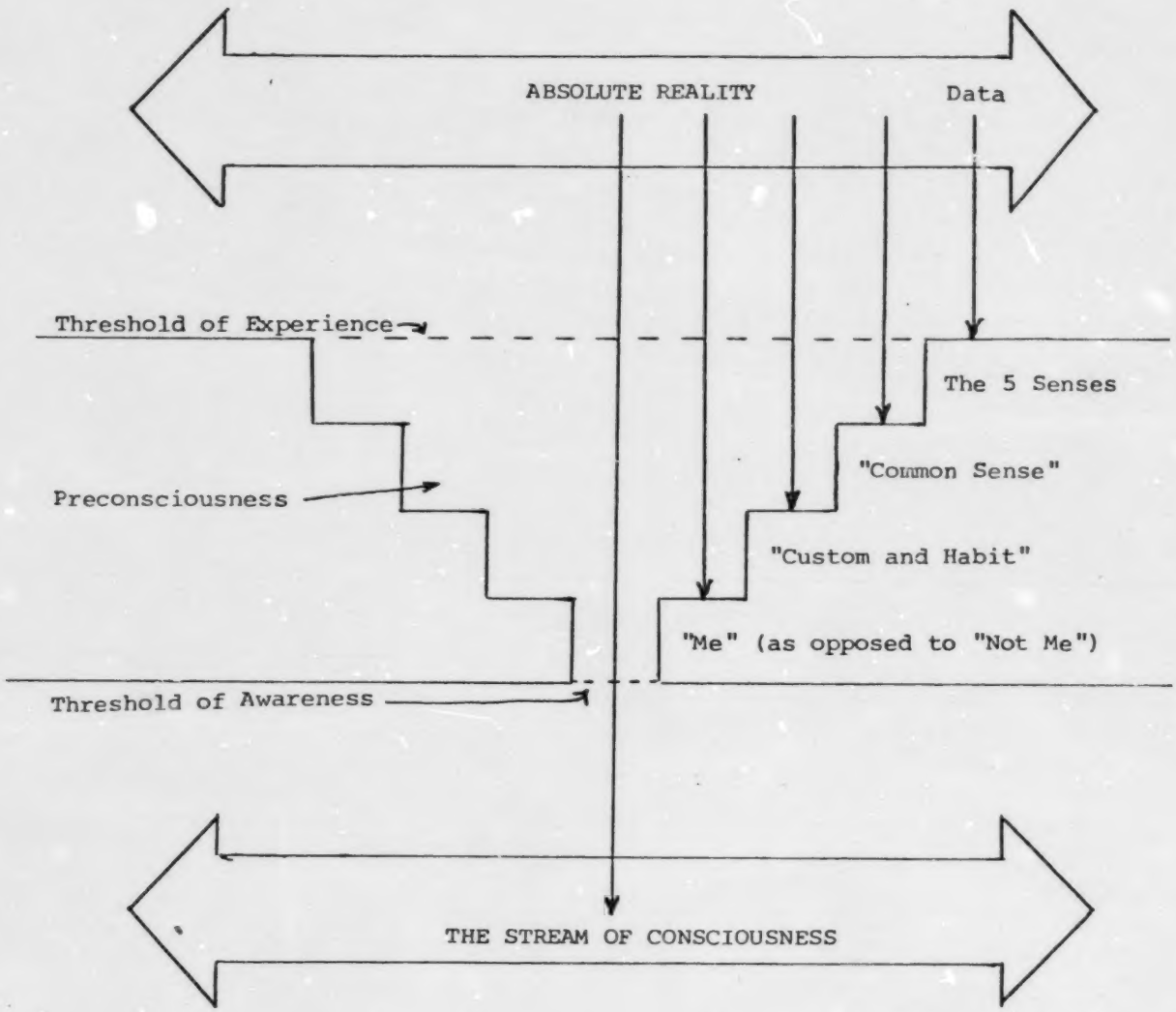
When we talk about <u>consciousness</u>,[4] we mean, basically, our awareness

of the world around us and of our self existing in the world, "experiencing" it. Although we tend to think of our consciousness as an accurate reflection of "reality," it is a highly limited awareness of the world. Our senses and our preconscious mind act as reducing valves to limit the data of which we are aware at any one time.[5] (See Figure 1.) These limits of awareness are useful because they give stability to our personal consciousness; if we were constantly aware of all available data, we could not make sense of the world. In William James' words, it would appear as it does to a baby, "one big blooming buzzing Confusion."

First, our awareness is limited by our five senses: sight, hearing, touch, smell, and taste. For instance, our most important sensory organ, the eye, is severely limited as to what light waves it can respond to. We can "see" neither ultraviolet nor infrared. Neither can our ears "hear" sound waves above 20,000 cycles per second or below 20 cycles per second. Outside the limits of our perception is a reality which we can never experience directly, but only indirectly by the use of technology or intellectually by the acceptance of scientific theory.

A further limitation on our awareness is what we call "common sense," which is learned and not inherited, but which is common to all human societies. This common sense is expressed in dichotomies of opposing categories such as hot/cold, big/little, up/down, male/female, nature/culture. These are shared awarenesses which allow us to function as humans. We exclude from our awareness that part of reality that doesn't fit into these categories.

Figure 1. The Preconscious Mind as a Reduction Valve



The specific culture in which we live further limits our awareness by enculturating us into certain customary ways of looking at reality. The most basic of these customs is our language. Women's Studies research in language has revealed over and over again how our language limits or orients our awareness.[6] In addition to language, our culture gives us habitual expectations and assumptions about the world and about how we should behave in the world. For instance, it sets behavioral expectations for persons performing certain roles: it is expected of young women that they will dress in alluring clothing, while it is expected of older women that they will not present themselves as alluring sexual objects.

In this process of eliminating data from our awareness, the reducing valves of the preconscious mind that we have described so far create a consciousness which we share to some extent with others in our society and culture. This shared consciousness gives us a sense of security or belonging which we call community. It is communal in that it creates a sense of continuity with other people, past, present, and future. We cling to this shared consciousness because it gives us a sense of stability or equilibrium in a world of change. There is a final limitation of our awareness, however, which is not communal but personal. This is the preconscious selection made by the Self, in James' words, the sense of "me" or "not me."

> The human race as a whole largely agrees as to what it shall notice and name, and what not. And among the noticed parts we select in much the same way for accentuation and preference or subordination and dislike. There is, however, one entirely extraordinary case in which no two men ever are known to choose alike. One great splitting of the whole universe into two halves is made by each of us; and for each of us almost all of the interest attaches to one of the halves; but we all draw the

> line of division between them in a different place. When I say that we all call the two halves by the same names, and that those names are "me" and "not-me" respectively, it will at once be seen what I mean. The altogether unique kind of interest which each human mind feels in those parts of creation which it can call me or mine may be a moral riddle, but it is a fundamental psychological fact. No mind can take the same interest in his neighbor's me as in his own. The neighbor's me falls together with all the rest of things in one foreign mass, against which his own me stands out in startling relief.[7]

The limited data which finally enters our stream of consciousness thus form the only experience we have of the world, albeit a very limited view. These limitations, however, create the peculiar quality of the stream of consciousness, its ability to maintain a day to day stability in the midst of constant flux and change. We feel stable because we know what to expect; we are accustomed to, and therefore comfortable with, the reality we experience in this limited way; we feel we belong to it and it belongs to us. It is "me," it is "mine." We rarely question the authenticity of this reality. In fact, we doggedly resist new information which might force us to change our awareness.[8]

At times, however, we experience a "shock of recognition," a moment when some unfamiliar bit of reality breaks through the limitations that shape our awareness. This is traditionally viewed as an expansion of consciousness. It can happen as the result of using drugs, hypnosis, or spiritual exercises; it can also occur in a seemingly spontaneous way, as in a religious experience or when the anomalies of knowledge become too great to allow the maintenance of previously accepted paradigms.[9] During such an experience the mind is flooded with data and the individual experiences an exhiliration. The women's movement has called it "consciousness-raising," indicating that it is a transcendence out of

an ordinary awareness of things and into a "higher" or more acute or intense awareness. As with a religious experience, the individual feels an overwhelming, even mystical, experience.

The classroom experience of consciousness changing may be similar in character to what we have described above.[10] But the change of consciousness that we would like to discuss here is a whole new way of "seeing" one's self and the world. The very process by which the individual's consciousness is formed is changed. It is a change from one mode of awareness to another--from a social/cultural mode of awareness to a highly personal mode of awareness, from a shared awareness to an unshared awareness.

Let us assume that most women, like most people, experience life on a day to day basis within the limits enculturated and socialized into their psyches by their cultural and social environment; they rarely question this shared awareness. Yet many women have a sense of subjective life that is different from the norm, other than the defined roles and values. For example, many women perform the role of mother and uphold the maternal values of the culture, but don't experience their selves as mothers, even while "mothering." In the same way, the male executive who rises to the top of his organization may constantly worry about "the day they find me out." This gnawing sense of dis-ease which the individual may feel vaguely or acutely, but can rarely articulate, is what Betty Friedan called "the problem that has no name." It is a duality of character, or schizophrenia, between the personal self--what James called the "me"--and the social/cultural image of what the self should be. It is a conflict between the individual's shared awareness and unshared awareness.

In the process of consciousness raising the Women's Studies class may make the conflict so apparent and personal that the student is forced to resolve it. Often the resolution is not a voluntary one--one the student "chooses"--but one the student feels compelled by internal emotional and psychological pressures to make. For some students the resolution will be, at least temporarily, a denial of the validity of their self-awareness and an acceptance of the shared cultural awareness. When the discomfort of becoming an autonomous and self-validating individual are seen as too great, the student will choose the comfort of security, stability, and continuity with the larger community, both past and present. For many students, however, the resolution will be a denial of the shared cultural/social awareness and an acceptance of the self. For these students, this resolution will entail a change of consciousness which will be both exhilirating and frightening. The exhiliration produces an enthusiasm and "newness" and a self-absorption with the "new me."

People who have had an intense religious experience call it being "born again." Actually, the self is not new, but it feels new because it is experienced differently. The individual can now begin to validate the unshared awareness outside of the limitation of the shared cultural/social awareness. It is this dis-covery of self that allows one to dis-cover one's cultural/social character because, ironically, only when one accepts the unshared awareness as valid or real can one see the unreality (limitations) of one's shared awareness. Also ironic is the fact that once this acceptance has been made, one immediately wishes to share this unshared awareness with others, as if to validate it.

As a result of this need for validation, Women's Studies courses

most often include the sharing of personal experiences; literary works are often used to evoke this sharing. When one recognizes the similarity of other women's experiences in these "me too" sessions, one can accept one's own experiences as authentic. One discovers that it is o.k. to be self-aware and to be so distanced from the majority culture. However, a final irony of the sharing is that it creates a shared awareness of its own which may simply replace the old limitations with new ones. It can encourage cult-like movements within society that are based on mutually held hostilities toward that society and preconceptions about what reality is.[11]

While the sharing of personal experience is a good and necessary part of Women's Studies classes, it it not enough. Neither is the other goal often set by Women's Studies courses: "traditional academic goals of intellectual mastery of subject matter and the imparting of a substantial amount of information."[12] As we have seen above, consciousness changing may radicalize the student; it causes her to question the roots of her being--social, cultural, and personal. She has a new personal awareness, but still needs to dis-cover the cultural/social shared awareness, how this awareness has shaped her character, and how she can reintegrate herself back into the culture. This process of discovery is likely to be an on-going one, extending over years. Subject matter and information will be helpful, but more important will be a method of critical inquiry which she can carry with her and use at will. If the student is to become autonomous, she must make her own mediation between the old consciousness and the new. To do this, she must attain a distance

from what is happening so that she can see and understand what is happening and then negotiate for herself the exchange of consciousness. It is this establishing of distance which is probably the most frustrating problem for teachers of Women's Studies courses, because the personal implications of much of the material creates a personal emotional response.

III.

A good method for gaining this distance, and thus allowing the student to mediate the exchange of consciousness, is the classical critical method. It is a distillation of methods which have been standard in the humanities, used in many different guises, from Aristotle's rhetorical analysis to the form-and-function methods of recent fine art criticism. It has been overshadowed during much of the last century by the social science method. And, to a great extent, it has been ignored in Women's Studies courses because the emotional and personal dimensions of the subject matter have made it seem inappropriate, even irrelevant. We have found it useful, however, in our teaching, and recommend it as a basic solution to the problem.

The point of this critical method is to discover the nature of the subject under investigation, whether that subject be a person, place, or event; an artifact or a performance; or simply an idea, an emotion, or an act. The basic approach is one of analysis, the breaking down of the subject into its constituent parts, each of which may be then scrutinized in some detail. Once this analysis has been satisfactorily accomplished,

then one may begin the process of synthesis, whereby the analyzed parts are reconstructed into an integral whole, the reconstruction done in such a way as to communicate to others one's newfound awareness of the subject. In short, the analysis gives the student the distance from the subject that allows her to deal with it knowledgeably; the synthesis gives her the opportunity to integrate her self-oriented awareness of the subject with other people's awareness of it.

When we talk about the nature of anything, we are technically talking about its theoretical structure, where structure is defined as the principles of a thing's existence. In any structure, there are four basic elements that play a part during the formation of the thing and that shape its nature accordingly. These are:

1. The materials out of which it is made.
2. The methods or techniques employed in its construction.
3. Its function or purpose.
4. The form, design, plan, or plot of the thing, sometimes regarded as its "style."

Of these four, perhaps, only the element of form needs further explanation.

Unlike structure, which is something inherent in a thing, form is something imposed upon it with a specific purpose in mind. We thus tend to think of aesthetics as soon as we think of form, and tend, thusly, to relegate considerations of form as appropriate mostly to the study of literature, music, and the fine arts. But it is an appropriate consideration elsewhere, as well. In the most utilitarian and biologically-necessary aspects of our lives, we impose plans of action or employ designs for living that have nothing to do with aesthetics. These add

form to our lives, giving them meaning and stability, apart from the inherent nature of our actions. Our manners, our rituals, our myths all have this formal aspect.

In addition to these four basic elements, there are several others often taken into account in the formation of some thing. These are not so much new aspects as they are elaborations and extensions of the four basic ones. Each requires some clarification, so we present them independently with explanations:

5. The medium, or vehicle of communication used to make us aware of the thing, has an effect on what we perceive its nature to be. For example, we tend to believe stories as true that are told to us face-to-face, while we tend to discount stories that are related to us over the mass media. Indeed, as Marshall McLuhan has suggested, the medium may be the message--or, at least, it shapes the message to conform to it.
6. The mode of the experience we have when we apprehend a thing contributes to our comprehension of its nature. For example, some things appear inherently funny to us, others, inherently sad. Some things are uplifting to our emotions, others, depressing. Some things leave us in a state of anxiety and doubt; others, in a state of affirmation and certainty. This aspect of mode may be discussed in terms of form, as when we talk about the plot of tragedy and the emotions it arouses. But to be fully understood, it should be considered in its own right, as part of the nature of a thing, as mood is considered a part of the nature of language.

7. The experience of any performance or artifact involves several points of view which should be taken into account in assessing the nature of the phenomenon. A film, for example, could be viewed from the producer's perspective (as a business enterprise); from the screenwriter's perspective (as a literary artifact); from the director's perspective (as an artfully orchestrated performance); from the character's perspective (as the story itself); or from the audience's perspective (as an evening's entertainment). Each has its own validity and needs to be considered in the analysis if a comprehensive rendering of the phenomenon is to be accomplished. This aspect, in particular, is productive in helping the student achieve distance from the subject under investigation--the necessity of considering points of view other than one's own.
8. The context or situation out of which a thing emerged invariably has some effect on its nature. This context may be physical--for example, a specific time and place in history; or it may be metaphysical--for example, a complex set of ideas or emotions that comprised the spiritual atmosphere of the time. Thus, the historical method always helps one discover the nature of a thing, whether it be a straight-forward study of the origins and development of the thing or a study of its place in the history of ideas or ideology.
9. A more specific context, however, is the rhetoric of the thing's formation, a category that deserves separate consideration because of its complexity. This is a study of how something

persuades us or others that it is real and worthy of attention. The rhetorical situation involves, first, the motives or goals that prompted the formation of the thing, and, second, the strategies and tactics used to achieve these goals or motives. To determine what part this rhetoric has in shaping the nature of a thing, one should consider the following:

(a) The psychological context, consisting of the personal motives involved and the emotional strategies employed in creating something.

(b) The social or cultural context, where class consciousness, race, ethnicity, or nationality come into play.

(c) The moral or ethical context, where religious attitudes and ideas about proper conduct influence something's formation.

(d) The political context, meaning not simply what political parties are involved, but the polarities of opinion as to who should govern in a given situation, which may become woven into the fabric of a thing.

(e) The economic context, particularly the profit motives and marketing strategies (including advertising) used in creating something.

(f) The aesthetic context, wherein ideas about beauty and pleasure motivate and guide the creation of an artifact or performance.

In this case, as in all nine aspects of the thing's nature, one is asking the same broad question: "To what degree, or how, or in what manner does this control, determine, or influence the

structure and eventual character of the entire entity?"

Having analyzed the thing into its constituent parts, one has only to articulate these parts into a coherent whole to complete one's study of it. To be sure, this synthesis will be as broad and as complex as the thing itself--or more specifically, as one's newfound awareness of it. One may use one's analysis as a guide in fashioning the synthesis, but it should be clear that the synthesis is a wholly separate endeavor, designed to accomodate the unique awareness one has acquired of the subject under investigation to the awareness of it shared by a larger public. If the process works, it should produce an even greater awareness of the thing, as one struggles to persuade others to share one's awareness of it, to accept one's awareness as truth and knowledge. This certainly is one of the traditional goals of scholarship and the academy.

The method we have outlined briefly above is not new; it is the old, reliable method of critical analysis used for years by humanists to train young scholars. Because it is a traditional method, however, it has been neglected or forgotten in many of the newer, radical courses of study such as Women's Studies. We see this old method as a radical method also because it allows students to systematically examine the nature, essence, or roots of a subject and, thus, to come to new understandings. It seems an appropriate response of the academic teacher of Women's Studies courses to the problem posed by consciousness changing as a classroom goal.

Footnotes

[1]See especially, William James, The Principles of Psychology (1890; reprint, New York: Dover Publications, 1950).

[2]We use the word radical here in its original sense. The OED says the word comes from Middle English and that its original meaning was "of or pertaining to a root or roots." A radical quality is a quality "inherent in the nature or essence of a thing or person; fundamental." We use the word in mathematics and philology in this sense: it is the root or fundamental essence or nature of a thing beyond which it cannot be broken down or analyzed.

[3]We would not imply that Women's Studies teachers take on these roles as psychologist or social worker; in most cases she will have neither the experience nor the time. We would suggest that a list of competent and helpful referrals be kept at hand and used when needed. As we will argue below, however, we see this immediate solution as a placebo; it may calm the student's anxiety, but it will not increase the student's competence.

[4]The arguments made here were derived largely from William James, The Principles of Psychology, The Varieties of Religious Experience (1902; reprint, New American Library, 1958), and Pragmatism (1907; reprint, New York: Meridian Books, 1955), and from Robert Ornstein, The Psychology of Consciousness (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1972) and The Nature of Human Consciousness (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Co., 1973).

[5]Aldous Huxley, in The Doors of Perception, wrote, "To make biological survival possible, Mind at Large has to be funneled through the reducing valve of the brain and nervous system. What comes out at the other end is a measly trickle of the kind of consciousness which will help us to stay alive on the surface of this particular planet. To formulate and express the contents of this reduced awareness, man has invented and endlessly elaborated those symbol-systems and implicit philosophies which we call languages. Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born--the beneficiary inasmuch as language gives access to the accumulated record of other people's experience, the victim in so far as it confirms him in the belief that reduced awareness is the only awareness and as it bedevils his sense of reality, so that he is all too apt to take his concepts for data, his words for actual things." Quoted by Ornstein, The Nature of Human Consciousness, p. 168.

[6]For a review of some of the research see the review essay by Cheris Dramer, Barrie Thorne, and Nancy Henley, "Perspectives on Language and Communication," Signs, III, 3 (Spring, 1978), 638-651.

[7]James, Principles of Psychology; quoted by Ornstein, Nature of Human Consciousness, p. 166.

[8]William James wrote in Pragmatism, p. 113, "Our minds thus grow in spots; and like grease-spots, the spots spread. But we let them spread as little as possible: we keep unaltered as much of our old knowledge, as many of our old prejudices and beliefs, as we can. We patch and tinker more than we renew. The novelty soaks in; it stains the ancient mass; but it is also tinged by what absorbs it. Our past apperceives and co-operates; and in the new equilibrium in which each step forward in the process terminates, it happens relatively seldom that the new fact is added raw. More usually it is embedded cooked, as one might say, or stewed down in the sauce of the old."

[9]See Huxley, The Doors of Perception; James, Varieties of Religious Experience; Thomas Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Herbert Butterfield, The Origins of Modern Science (Rev. ed., New York: Free Press, 1965).

[10]We are not limiting this experience to those which occur in the classroom or even as a result of what happens in the classroom. Many Women's Studies students appear in the classroom because they have already undergone the experience.

[11]We view many of the feminist-separatist movements in this light. As temporary way stations for individuals trying to restructure a consciousness in equilibrium, they may be helpful. As a replacement of one set of cultural/social limitations of consciousness by another, they do not offer more than a less oppressive physical environment in which to dwell.

[12]Lorelei R. Brush, Alice Ross Gold, and Marni Goldstein White, "The Paradox of Intention and Effect: A Women's Studies Course," Signs, III, 4 (Summer, 1978), 870.